

U.S. MISSION GERMANY

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American Citizen News

It's Tax Time!

Tax time is already upon us! But, it doesn't have to be a stressful experience. Internet resources and planning ahead can make the process fast and painless. The Internal Revenue Service website, www.irs.gov is full of useful information, tips and forms for taxpayers. Plus, the IRS office in Frankfurt is always here to help. You can reach the office by calling + 49 69 7535 3834.

Top Ten Tax Time Tips

1. **Gather your records...now!** It's never too early to start getting together any documents or forms you'll need when filing your taxes: receipts, canceled checks, and other documents that support an item of income or a deduction you're taking on your return. Also, be on the lookout for W-2s and 1099s, coming soon from your employer.
2. **Find your forms.** Whether you file a 1040 or 1040-EZ, you can download all IRS forms and publications on the IRS website, [IRS.gov](http://irs.gov).
3. **Do a little research.** Check out Publication 17 on [IRS.gov](http://irs.gov). It's a comprehensive collection of information for taxpayers highlighting everything you'll need to know when filing your return. Review Pub 17 to ensure you're taking all credits and deductions for which you're eligible.
4. **Think ahead to how you'll file.** Will you prepare your return yourself or go to a preparer? Do you qualify to file at no cost using Free File on [IRS.gov](http://irs.gov)? Will you purchase tax preparation software or file online? Give yourself time to decide on the option that best suits your needs.
5. **Take your time.** Rushing to get your return filed increases the chance you will make a mistake and not catch it.
6. **Double-check your return.** Mistakes will slow down the processing of your return. In particular, make sure all the Social Security Numbers and math calculations are correct.
7. **Consider e-file.** When you file electronically, the computer will handle the math calculations for you, and you will get your refund in about half the time it takes when you file a paper return.

Continued on page 3.

Public Announcement: Worldwide Caution

The State Department released a new Worldwide Caution Public Announcement on February 2, 2009 alerting American citizens about the continuing threat of terrorist actions and violence against Americans and American interests throughout the world. American citizens are reminded to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness. For a full text of the Worldwide Caution, click [here](#).

To apply for
ESTA authorization:

<https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/>

Visit the following
website for additional
information:

“Know Before You Go”
www.CBP.gov/travel

On Jan 12, 2009 ESTA
became mandatory for
all Visa Waiver Pro-
gram visitors to the
United States.

ESTA registration is
not for U.S. Citizens or
Legal Permanent Resi-
dents, only for foreign
citizens visiting the U.S.
under the Visa Waiver
Program.

Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA)

The ESTA program became mandatory on January 12, 2009, for Visa Waiver Program travelers who are traveling to the U.S. **It does not apply to U.S. citizens or U.S. legal permanent residents.** All Visa Waiver Program travelers must log on to the web-based ESTA system and complete an application online providing the biographical and eligibility information currently required on the paper I-94W form.

ESTA is mandatory for all citizens or nationals of Visa Waiver Program countries, including accompanied and unaccompanied minors, who plan to travel to the United States for temporary business or pleasure and who do not already have a valid American visa in their passport. Each traveler must have an individual ESTA approval prior to boarding a carrier to travel by air or sea to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program. Visa Waiver Program travelers who fail to obtain an ESTA approval after January 12, 2009 may be denied boarding, experience delayed processing, or be denied entry into the U.S.

Children's passports (Kinderreisepässe) issued **on or extended after October 26, 2006** are not valid for visa-free travel, because they are not issued as electronic passports (e-passports) with an integrated electronic chip. Similar problems arise with the “Kinderausweise,” an identity card for children used for travel within Europe which also fails to meet the requirements for the Visa Waiver Program. Both of these children's documents require visas. Children can however apply for a regular, albeit more expensive, electronic passport for ESTA registration and Visa Waiver Program travel.

Travelers are not required to have specific plans to travel to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program before they apply for an ESTA authorization. Department of Homeland Security recommends that an ESTA approval be obtained as soon as a Visa Waiver Program traveler begins to plan a trip to the United States, and no later than 72 hours before departure. Additionally, if an applicant's destination address or itinerary should change after the authorization has been received, he/she may update that information on the secure ESTA website.

In most cases, ESTA will provide an almost immediate determination of eligibility for travel under the Visa Waiver Program. Travelers will receive an electronic response. Possible responses include: **Authorization Approved, Travel Not Authorized, or Authorization Pending.** An approved ESTA travel authorization is: 1) valid for up to two years or until the traveler's passport expires, whichever comes first; 2) valid for multiple entries into the U.S.; and 3) not a guarantee of admissibility to the United States at a port of entry. In the event that an ESTA applicant is denied authorization to travel to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program, he or she will be referred to www.travel.state.gov for information on how to apply for a U.S. visa.



Top Ten Tax Time Tips (continued from page 1)

8. **Think about Direct Deposit.** If you elect to have your refund directly deposited into your bank account, you'll receive it faster than waiting for a check by mail. To use direct deposit you must have a U.S. bank account.
9. **Visit IRS.gov often.** The official IRS website is a great place to find everything you'll need to file your tax return: forms, tips, FAQs and updates on tax law changes.
10. **Relax.** There's no need to panic. If you run into a problem, remember the IRS is here to help.

The New Passport Card



All American Citizen Services Sections/units in Mission Germany recently started accepting applications for the new U.S. passport card. The card is proof of identity and U.S. citizenship and is about the size of a credit card. You can apply using the same application forms that you use when applying for a passport book. **But beware, the card is not valid for air travel of any kind or for travel within Europe!** This new travel document offers a convenient way for American citizens to re-enter the United States through *land* and *sea* ports of entry **from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Bermuda** after June 1, 2009.

The new passport card, a less-expensive and more portable alternative to the passport book, has the same validity period: 10 years for adults and five years for children. **The passport card is designed for the specific needs of residents of The United States' northern and southern border communities who frequently cross the border into Canada and Mexico, and IS NOT a globally recognized travel document as is the traditional passport book.** The cost of the Passport Card is \$45 for first-time adult applicants and \$35 for children under 16. Adults who currently have valid U.S. passports may apply for the passport

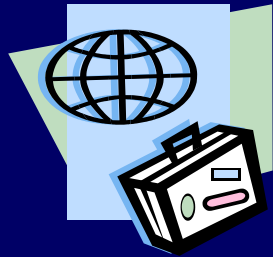
Visa Pages and Valid Travel Documents

Have passport, will travel? Make sure you have room for those entry stamps! Many countries require two to three available visa pages. Others require that your passport not expire for at least six months from your planned entry. Still others require American citizens to apply for a visa before reaching their border. Plus, many countries limit the length of time Americans are allowed to stay in a country as a tourist to a couple of weeks or months. How can you know what the requirements or regulations are? Before traveling, always visit travel.state.gov to learn about country specific requirements.

Applying for extra visa pages is a fast process. When you fill out an application and visit a consulate or Embassy, visa pages can usually be added to a valid passport on the same day. Plus, visa pages are free! However, visa pages are only issued during normal business hours, so be sure to plan ahead. Up to two sets of visa pages can be added to a valid passport.

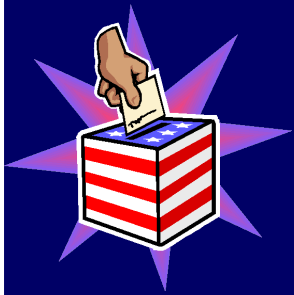
Planning Tips

- Always check passport validity to ensure that your passport is not expired and will not expire while you are traveling.
- To be on the safe side when traveling abroad, make sure that you have at least two blank visa pages and that your passport has at least six months validity.
- U.S. Legal Permanent Residents (also known as LPRs or "Green Card" Holders) should renew and update U.S. residence documentation prior to their departure from the United States.
- If your passport is expired or will expire prior to your travel date, apply to have your passport renewed. Remember to make an appointment if necessary and to allow 3-4 weeks for the renewal process.
- If you need additional visa pages, you may mail in your passport and application to have visa pages added. Be sure to allow 2 weeks for mailing and processing or visit your local American Citizen Services Section to have visa pages added.



For more information and great tips on international travel, please visit:

www.travel.state.gov



Find out more at:

<http://www.fvap.gov/global/news/nr23/index.html>

Dual Citizenship: Important Info

The concept of dual nationality means that a person is a citizen of two countries at the same time. **All U.S. citizens are required to enter and exit the United States with their U.S. passport**, regardless of age and regardless of what other nationalities they may possess. U.S. citizens who attempt to enter the U.S. with a foreign passport may run into serious problems at the U.S. border. All persons who have a claim to U.S. citizenship should apply at the Embassy or consulates for a U.S. passport before traveling to the U.S.

The U.S. Government recognizes that dual nationality exists but does not encourage it as a matter of policy because of the problems it may cause. Claims of other countries on dual national U.S. citizens may conflict with U.S. law, and dual nationality may limit U.S. Government efforts to assist citizens abroad. The country where a dual national is located generally has a stronger claim to that person's allegiance. However, dual nationals owe allegiance to both the United States and the foreign country. They are required to obey the laws of both countries. Either country has the right to enforce its laws, particularly if the person later travels there.

If you are a dual national, it is usually best to carry both your U.S. citizen passport and other passport when traveling. U.S. dual nationals must enter and exit the U.S. on a U.S. passport. Dual nationals may also be required by the foreign country to use its passport to enter and leave that country.

2009 Voting Slogan Contest

Voting is your constitutional right! What inspires you to vote? What calls you to take action and vote? Now is your chance to express your thoughts on the importance of voting by entering the 2009 Voting Slogan Contest. To enter the Federal Voting Assistance Program's 2009 Slogan Contest, just create a simple slogan that expresses the importance of voting and inspires voter participation. The slogans will be judged by a panel on originality and motivation, and the contest winner and runners-up will receive a certificate of recognition from the Department of Defense. The winning slogan will be featured in the FVAP's 2010/2011 outreach campaign, including the FVAP website www.fvap.gov, motivational posters, and other FVAP publications.

How to submit an entry

Each entry may **contain only one slogan**, but multiple entries are permitted. All entries must be received by **April 9, 2009**. Include your **full name, branch of service (if military), mailing address, daytime telephone number, fax number and e-mail address** (if applicable). Please note that this contest is organized in conjunction with the DOD, but is open to all Americans.

E-mail: slogan@fvap.ncr.gov. Text only (messages with attachments are deleted for information security purposes).

Fax: (703) 696-1352 or DSN 426-1352. Visit the FVAP website at www.fvap.gov for international toll-free fax numbers. No cover sheet is necessary.

Mail: Type or print entries on a regular letter size sheet of paper, and mail to
Federal Voting Assistance Program
Attn: Voting Slogan Contest
1155 Defense Pentagon
Washington DC 20301-1155

Notes from Frankfurt Consular Section Chief Lawrence Mire



Soon after drafting my last message, I made a list of vote quotes for possible use in this issue. One by one, all the cynical quotes dropped from the list, thrust aside by the fervor and passion of the election campaign. Harry Truman's adage that "It's not the hand that signs the laws that holds the destiny of America. It's the hand that casts the ballot..." took on new resonance. The last remaining quote on my list, however, was President Lyndon Johnson's prophetic observation that "The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men because they are different from other men."

America is an amazing country with an astonishing ability to recreate and redefine itself, and an infinite capacity to surprise and astonish even the most jaded observer. America is not the product of a hundred generations rooted in the soil of one place, shackled together by language, custom and religion. America is an act of imagination, an idea expressed in the Declaration of Independence and defined in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. We are American because of our allegiance to the Constitution and our belief in certain inalienable rights. A nation of immigrants, we are Americans by choice, not fate.

The choices we have to make are not always easy and it's hard work being a good citizen. Just as we begin to catch our breath from the '08 election campaign, another civic season is upon us: the tax season. While few of us will approach the task with the same enthusiasm as the election, this too is a civic duty. Our website ([Frankfurt.usconsulate.gov](http://frankfurt.usconsulate.gov)) provides convenient links to online tax resources to help you prepare for April 15.

Opening Hours and Contact Information

U.S. Consulate General Frankfurt

Giessener Strasse 30
60435 Frankfurt am Main
<http://frankfurt.usconsulate.gov>

Passport Unit

Open by appointment: 7:30am to 11:30am, M-F
Tel: (069) 7535-2100, 2:00pm to 4:00pm only
Fax: (069) 7535-2304
Email: frankfurtpassports@state.gov
frankfurtbirthabroad@state.gov

Special Consular Services

Open by appointment: 7:30am to 11:30am, M-F
Tel: (069) 7535-2102
Email: GermanyACS@state.gov
After-Hour Emergencies: (069) 7535-0

Holiday Closures and Upcoming Events

Thursday, February 26:

Thursday, March 26:

Friday, April 10:

Monday, April 13:

Thursday, April 30:

Friday, May 1:

Staff Administration Day

Staff Administration Day

Good Friday

Easter Monday

Staff Administration Day

Labor Day

Check our website for information about an upcoming Federal Voting Assistance Program event to be held in Frankfurt and a gathering for U.S. students studying in Germany to be held in Heidelberg. Exact dates TBD.